

Identify characteristic ideologies which define currently local design practices, describe the qualities of design works which define them, that have meaningful impact on social cultural norms of Singapore or International Asia?

Singapore is a thriving society with people who crave for the latest trends in the design industry. Throughout the decades, Singapore has seen many changes in its design, from traditional styles such as ornamental Chinese setups and furniture, to today's minimalistic drive. In this essay, I will be discussing how minimalism has empowered our design aesthetic and its affects to society.

Minimalism first started off during the post-World War 2 period in America as an abstract form of art. The artworks created during that time only consisted of simple geometric shapes based on the square and the rectangle. They had the concept of "*what you see is what you see*". Today, minimalism has integrated into modern design, especially in the home design sector.

In Asia, minimalism has impacted designers and stores to produce simpler products that make the space look clean. According to The Minimalist Society, minimalism uses *only the fewest elements possible to maximise the overall effect*, ensuring that the *space in the home are used as effectively and efficiently as possible*. The *absence of clutter* leaves the owner with less tasks, creating a *calming effect and reduces stress*. Lastly, *quality is always prioritized over quantity*, as every design piece becomes a *focal point in each room* (The Minimalist Society). Many brands have taken up minimalism as their concept to appeal to the general public, inspiring others to do so too.

One extremely popular minimalist design brand would be Muji. Meaning 'no brand quality goods' in Japanese, Muji was created with the mindset that quality goods take priority over its design. Muji's products are simple and functionable, using very neutral tones – mainly earthly colours and white. It brings about comfort, ease and even familiarity within the user. Thus acting as a driving force for increased purchases in Muji.

Muji received good feedback from the local community, as people started to lean towards the beauty of minimalism. It has increased steadily, currently with 11 local outlets and 2 cafes (Janice Heng). Many consumers have benefitted from Muji's minimalistic and efficient storage systems. The advantage of its products is the way it can co-exist with each other, despite their different materials. For instance, their wooden products are very compatible with their plastic and acrylic storage compartments. In addition, consumers can easily customise Muji products to make it their own, as the initial design of the product is made to be simple and unnoticeable. From furniture to fashion, Muji maintains consistency with its plain outlook and small colour palette, standing out as a simplistic brand among others. As a user of Muji products myself, I like the different ways I can customise my space with their products, while maintaining a calm atmosphere.

These minimalist-inspired brands have changed Singapore's outlook on design, and also aided in pushing concepts such as sustainability. In terms of style, minimalism takes on a completely different stance from usual traditional decorations. In the past, Chinese families would have many ornaments that brought luck and used striking colours. However, families today have transitioned to simpler household styles, seeking more minimalist design, thus

going to stores like Muji to get their household resources. Some may say that minimalism has diluted the beauty of tradition, but I disagree, and rather, would say that minimalism enhanced the beauty of tradition. People appreciate the traditional decorations and designs when they are put up during festive seasons, as they stand out so much from the normal everyday minimalist style. Thus, minimalism helps in increasing one's appreciation for the traditional styles, using its huge contrast in aesthetics.

In addition, Muji has been practicing green activism by boosting its sustainability in its products. One of its programmes, called ReMuji, *lets consumers drop off their unwanted clothes for recycling, similar to programs from fashion brands like Madewell and H&M. Muji sifts through the donated clothes, dyes them indigo, and presents them in its stores as a collection of one-of-a-kind garments* (Anne Quito). Rather than openly pushing eco-friendliness, they make the concept eminent through their making process. Muji's apparel is made in an *eco-friendly dyeing and sewing plant in Cambodia and sources products from Kenya and Kyrgyzstan, abiding by sustainability principles set by the UN's Business Call to Action* (Anne Quito).

All in all, minimalism has benefitted Singapore in general, not only by bringing clean aesthetics, but also promoting concepts such as sustainability, while increasing appreciation for traditional styles. The simplicity of this style would allow it to stay in trend and continue to inspire more brands and their design outlook.

References

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